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TERRIFIC FIRE IN HONGKONG.

DESTRUCTION OF SEVERAL HUNDREDS OF HOUSES.

SPEAKING in the Legislative Council a year or two ago with reference to the organisation of the Fire Brigade, Sir Arthur Kennedy said that, sometimes when he looked down from Government House on the closely built dwellings and business habitations in the centre of this city, he trembled to think what the consequences might be of a fire originating in the midst of those buildings. Our late Governor could hardly have imagined on these occasions a worse calamity from fire than befel this Colony last night. Within the space of about twelve hours hundreds of houses have been destroyed, and probably thousands of people have been deprived of their homes. It is calculated that about ten acres of ground have been covered by the fire, and when it is added that the catastrophe has occurred in a densely populated part of Victoria, where rows after rows of houses succeed each other in close order, some idea of the amount of the property destroyed may be conjectured. The fire originated last night (Christmas Day) at about 11 p.m., and at the moment of writing this (3 p.m. to-day) the last fierce battle between the firemen and the flames has just been brought to a victorious conclusion. It is believed that the conflagration has now been brought fairly under control, although a high wind and a little lack of watchfulness on the part of the firemen might result in the flames again setting out on their destructive course through the Colony.

Commencing at Fisher's—a small general dealer's establishment in Endicott Lane, in the neighbourhood of the P. & O. Offices the fire, fanned by a pretty strong breeze, at intervals from the north, rapidly extended in a southerly direction through the Colony, crossed the Queen's Road and other streets, and was only brought under control this morning on reaching the Station Compound. The Civil Hospital and several European establishments are in ruins. So far as we could ascertain from a careful tramp round the scene of the conflagration this morning, its boundaries are as follows. On the west Scott Lane bounds the block of Praya buildings visited by the fire, although portions of this block owing to the southerly direction of the wind escaped without injury, the P. & O. offices being among the buildings saved from the devouring element. The firemen made a desperate stand against the fire in Gilman's street, but the row of buildings intervening between it and Gilman's bazaar could be only kept free from the flames at the Praya end. This morning an immense quantity of half-burnt firewood could be seen in the Bazaar—one evidence at least of the activity and success of the firemen in their efforts to get the configuration under. In saying so much, however, it must not be understood that there is unmixed satisfaction abroad at the way in which things were managed last night and this morning; in fact many people are of opinion that the fire ought not have been allowed to cross the Queen's Road. Having got across this main thoroughfare, the fire was not stayed in its westerly course until it reached the Stag Hotel, which is the first building standing intact to the westward on that side of the way. From the Stag Hotel the fire pursued its southerly course (to most people the course probably seemed a south-easterly one) until on its western limit it reached Schmidt's, the gun-maker's, at the corner of Peel and Wellington Streets. This establishment it burnt, but left A. Lock's, gold and silver-smith, at the opposite western corner. Thence the fire took its way upwards to the walls of the Police Magistracy and Goal establishments, where its southerly course was arrested. Cochrane Street, Gutzlaff Street, Graham Street, were entirely destroyed, and also portions of Stanley Street, Wellington Street, Gage Street, Lyndhurst Terrace and Hollywood Road. The eastern limit of the fire in the Queen's Road on the north side is the entrance gate to the P. & O. offices, which is to the east of the offices themselves. From this gate the eastern limit of the fire crosses the Queen's Road, and extends eastwards to Koss's establishment, whence it passes straight up Pottinger Street to the walls of the Magistracy. The whole of the eastern side of Pottinger Street is saved, while the whole of the opposite side is burnt.

Perhaps the most exciting work of the whole fire was the battle to prevent the flames from crossing from Koss's at the bottom of Pottinger Street, to the opposite side of that thoroughfare.

The saving of the whole of the fine block of buildings terminating in the Hongkong Dispensary at the eastern end depended on the success of this conflict between the firemen and the flames, and probably also the safety of the Hongkong Club, the *China Mail* Office, the German Club, and the whole block of noble buildings extending eastwards from the German Club to the Cathedral. It did not appear to have been discovered until 10 or 11 o'clock this morning that the fire was quietly working its way towards Koss's establishment, and another lofty building a little higher up Pottinger Street. The latter establishment first attracted attention, and a great deal was done in the way of removing the verandas and other wood-work to prevent the flames from spreading to the low building exactly opposite. Later on an attempt was made to blow up the same house with gunpowder or dynamite, but it was only partially successful, and presently the house was in full blaze. Koss's establishment also burst into flames at about the same time. An effort had also been made to blow this building up when it was seen that it must go, and that there was considerable danger of its communicating the flames to the Hongkong Dispensary block, but beyond smashing the glass, tearing the interior to pieces somewhat and bulging out the iron shutters, the explosion had little effect. Presently the imposing building burst from top to bottom into flames. The iron shutters became red-hot, and the interior of the building was like a roaring furnace. Most people were inclined to the opinion that it was impossible to save the Hongkong Dispensary block, and preparations were made in the most remote of the buildings, and even in the succeeding block, in which the Club and the office of this paper is situated, for sudden removal of effects. The firemen did their best, but with the miserable streams of water at their command, they could do no more than keep the walls of the hill opposite to the roaring conflagration at Koss's wetted. The jets would not reach to the top of the building. To make matters worse the fire in the building about thirty yards higher up the hill became more intense, and at one period fire was discovered in the low building opposite, previously referred to, but was speedily extinguished. Fortunately the wind was light, and a little later was blowing straight up the hill, slowly the flames in the two buildings were reduced in intensity, and a mighty sigh of relief must have gone round when it was seen that the firemen had obtained control of the fire, and that the Hongkong Dispensary block and succeeding blocks were saved.

ANOTHER REPORT.

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